

# Senator Harkin: Fighting for America's Middle Class

*"Access to education, training, and employment services is critical to helping our workers secure good jobs, gain access to the middle class, and become economically self-sufficient. I have no higher priority in Congress than to promote legislation that helps strengthen and grow our middle class." — Senator Tom Harkin*

Senator Tom Harkin's humble beginnings have motivated a 40 year career dedicated to policies that promote fairness and opportunity for all. Inspired by his father, Patrick, a coal miner who died from black lung disease, Harkin went on to fight for strong workplace protections and safety standards in Congress. To this day, Patrick Harkin's Works Projects Administration (WPA) card still hangs in Harkin's office; serving as a daily reminder that government has a role to play in giving people hope and building economic opportunity. Throughout his career, Harkin has fought for workers' rights and a strong middle class. In his capacity as Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee with jurisdiction over labor issues, Harkin has played a pivotal role in growing workers' paychecks, protecting their hard-earned benefits, and keeping them safe on the job. **Highlights of Harkin's work to strengthen the middle class and create economic opportunities for all Americans include:**

## **Fighting for Fair Pay for Fair Work:**

- Since entering Congress in 1974, Harkin has consistently fought for a fair minimum wage and has played a role in five successful efforts to raise the minimum wage from \$1.60 to \$7.25 per hour today.
- As Chairman of the Senate HELP Committee, Harkin authored and has been the lead Senate champion of the [Fair Minimum Wage Act](#), which would bring minimum wage workers out of poverty by increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour and indexing it to inflation.
- Harkin has also been the leader in protecting workers' paychecks by defending overtime rights. He led the effort to stop rollbacks of overtime pay for workers during the George W. Bush Administration, and he has proposed legislation on several occasions – most recently the [Restoring Overtime Pay for Working Americans Act](#) – that would help to restore the 40 hour workweek for low- and mid-wage salaried workers. His strong advocacy on overtime rights helped to spur [executive action from President Obama](#) instructing the Secretary of Labor to implement reforms similar to the Harkin proposal that will ensure that workers across the country are not unfairly denied time-and-a-half overtime pay.
- Harkin has consistently championed prevailing wage laws that ensure fair pay for workers on federally funded construction and service projects and has played a leading role in defeating attacks on these laws.

## **Protecting Workers' Fundamental Rights:**

- Harkin has always recognized that supporting and protecting workers' fundamental rights to organize and bargain collectively is critical to preserving and growing the American middle class. Over the years, he has fought to protect these rights, repeatedly defeating amendments to legislation that would have curtailed bargaining rights or undermined fair wage standards for workers.
- Harkin has championed numerous forward-looking legislative reforms that would strengthen workers' rights. Most recently, he was the lead Senate sponsor of the *Employee Free Choice Act*, which would ensure that workers have a full and fair opportunity to choose whether they want union representation.
- In 2013, Harkin successfully led the Senate in confirming the first full, five-member National Labor Relations Board in more than a decade.

## **Preparing America's Workforce:**

- In 2014, Harkin led the [bipartisan reauthorization](#) of the *Workforce Investment Act*, a long overdue bill that provides innovative solutions that will better prepare American workers for jobs of the future and will help connect workers with job opportunities in their communities.
- Since 2003, as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (the LHHS subcommittee), Harkin has secured more than \$100 million to create and support new Job Corps centers across the country, including centers in Denison and Ottumwa, Iowa. In 2015, new centers are

scheduled to open in New Hampshire and Wyoming. With the addition of these two centers, there will be at least one Job Corps center in all 50 States.

### **Strengthening Social Security and Retirement Savings Plans for Current and Future Generations:**

- Harkin authored the [\*Strengthening Social Security Act of 2013\*](#), a measure to expand Social Security by increasing benefits for current and future beneficiaries while making Social Security stronger for future generations by extending the life of the Social Security Trust Fund through 2049.
- Harkin led the fight against Social Security privatization during the George W. Bush Administration.
- In 2013, Harkin introduced the [\*Universal, Secure, and Adaptable \(USA\) Retirement Act\*](#), a comprehensive proposal to provide workers with retirement income for life, tackle the growing retirement crisis, and rebuild the private pension system.
- Harkin successfully enacted legislation in 2014 to create a new “Participant and Plan Sponsor Advocate” at the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation to give workers and retirees a voice when their pensions are in jeopardy.
- In 2006, Harkin enacted legislation to prevent companies from dramatically eroding the pensions of older, longer serving employees in complicated pension plan conversions.
- Harkin led efforts in the Senate and worked with the Obama Administration to promote regulations that would protect working people by helping both employers and employees better understand the fees they were being charged in their 401(k) plans.

### **Supporting Safe Workplaces for all American Workers:**

- Harkin has fought to provide federal agencies with the resources they need to carry out their missions, including worker safety oversight, mine safety oversight, and occupational safety and health research.
- Harkin supported efforts to improve outdated regulations to ensure they reflect modern science and better protect workers from occupational safety and health hazards.
- Harkin championed rules to protect workers from the dangers of exposure to crystalline silica, and pushed for a recently finalized rule that would protect coal miners from excessive exposure to dangerous dust that causes black lung disease.

### **Supporting Working Families:**

- Harkin has always believed that hardworking people should not have to make impossible choices between their jobs and their family obligations. He introduced the *Healthy Families Act*, legislation that would provide paid sick days to millions of American workers who are currently forced to choose between their health, their family’s health, and their jobs.
- Harkin sponsored landmark legislation to ensure fair scheduling practices at work. The *Schedules That Work Act* would allow workers to make requests about their schedules without fear of retaliation, and it would set standards for the scheduling predictability that working families need.
- Harkin has also been a leading advocate for equal pay for women. He has been a strong supporter of the *Paycheck Fairness Act*, which would remedy weaknesses in existing equal pay laws, and has introduced the *Fair Pay Act*, legislation that would seek to address the longstanding historical pay gaps between male-dominated and female-dominated occupations requiring similar levels of skillset.

For more information, please visit Senator Harkin’s website at <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.